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COMMAND AND CONTROL:
THE ACHILLES HEEL
OF THE
IRAN HOSTAGE RESCUE MISSION

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

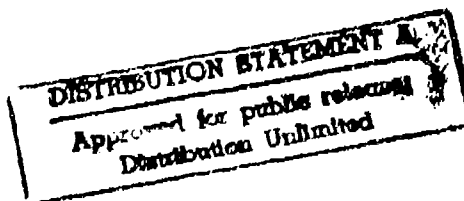
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On 25 April 1980, at approximately 0255 hours in the middle of the dark, hostile desert of Iran, the United States of America gave up several million dollars worth of equipment, their stature as a world military leader, and, most importantly, the lives of eight servicemen. This was a high price to pay, considering the United States failed to accomplish its mission -- the rescue of fifty-three Americans held hostage in Tehran for 173 days. This example of a military failure, code named Operation DESERT CLAW, has been scrutinized by many authors, experts, and participants, but few seem to focus on this one major issue and the thesis of this paper. The Iran hostage rescue mission was destined to failure from its conception due to a lack of adherence to common command and control procedures that perpetuated from the national or strategic command level and filtered to the tactical command level.

The intent of this paper is not to revisit bad memories but to take another look at some events that provide us with important lessons. We, as leaders, are responsible for capitalizing on these lessons in order to provide our country and our subordinates, those depending on us, with the best possible product available. Here, as in most cases, hindsight is 20/20; but, it is also a valuable asset. The effort here is not to use it in order to fix blame on any individual or group of individuals, but to study those areas where command and control was an issue.

Some might contend that command and control was not a major issue; that the planning process used was totally acceptable, and the organization was tailored to suit the mission. Some argue that it was a mission requiring

special operations forces and some procedures that apply to conventional warfare would not be applicable. Many think the operation was feasible but failed because of poor maintenance procedures or just simple bad luck. The Holloway Commission, appointed by the Department of Defense to investigate the operation, noted twenty-three findings in its report. One of those findings was command and control. However, the Commission stated that, "Command and control was excellent at the upper echelons, but became more tenuous and fragile at intermediate levels"¹ This paper takes exception to that opinion and to the others stated in this paragraph, holding the position that the command and control problems started at the top and reflected in the performance at the bottom.

This is a rare case study of command and control that can be started at the top and followed through to the bottom. In other words, there are command and control issues worth studying at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. In supporting its thesis, this paper will examine events and actions at each of those levels of command, highlighting the issues that are predominant throughout the mission. Prior to that, however, a brief discussion of command and control, why it is important, and what it is in terms of this paper is necessary. Also, a short synopsis of the failed mission is necessary to distinguish certain events.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

If one were to conduct a survey of what command and control is, a myriad of answers would probably result. It is certainly a broad topic, but one that requires the utmost attention. The Department of Defense defines "command and control" in JCS Pub 0-1 as:

The exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned forces in the accomplishment of the mission. Command and control functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures which are employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordination, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission.

Professor Frank Snyder, a noted expert on the issues of command and control, divides the JCS definition into three distinct parts. He describes the first sentence of the of the definition as the "function" of command. He labels the middle part of the definition as the "system" of command and control. In other words those physical items such as computers, radios, or command posts that provide the commander with information. The focus of this paper, however, is found in the last part of the JCS definition that addresses planning, direction, coordination, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission. Professor Snyder decrees this part of the definition as the "process" of command and control. He characterizes this process as "the reduction of uncertainty and consists of making situation assessments and operational decisions, and of establishing the organization."²

The command and control process is vitally important. It can be argued that all military operations start with the process of command and control. Whether it is the President or a senior commander, someone must make the initial decisions on the organization of forces to accomplish the mission and the operational characteristics of the mission. Obviously, if these decisions are wrong, it could have a major impact on mission accomplishment. History provides us with many examples of the command and control process and how its use has proved successful or unsuccessful. From this history, as well as the compilation of personal experiences, the U.S. military has gathered a great deal of information on the process of command and control. After analyzing this information, they develop principles, standards, or procedures to follow in

order to achieve an effective command and control process. The procedures are then made available to the military population through training manuals, films, and various other forms of media.

The point here is not that following these procedures will guarantee success or even that there are established command and control procedures for every situation. Ulysses S. Grant once said, "I don't understate the value of military knowledge, but if men make war in slavish obedience to rules, they will fail."³ This paper has no argument with his point but does argue that if men make war in total disregard to established standards and procedures, they will also fail.

MISSION SYNOPSIS⁴

At approximately 1905 hours on 24 April, 1980, eight RH-53D Sea Stallion helicopters lifted off the U.S.S. Nimitz, operating in the Gulf of Oman. The helicopters had a six hundred mile trip to look forward to. Simultaneously, six C-130 variants were airborne from the island of Masirah, just off the coast of Oman. Both flights of aircraft were enroute to rendezvous with one another at a site in the Iranian desert about 300 miles southeast of Tehran code named Desert One. At Desert One, the helicopters would refuel and transload the ground assault force from the C-130s. Then, they would proceed to Desert Two, where they would drop their passengers to hide for the night before flying to their own hide site.

About two hours into their flight, helicopter number six was forced to execute a precautionary landing due to the illumination of blade inspection method (BIM) cockpit caution light. Helicopter number eight followed number six to the ground, in accordance with the planned recovery procedures.

The aircraft commander decided to abandon the aircraft as unflyable. Helicopter number eight picked up number six's crew and continued with the mission.

Three hours into the mission, the helicopter flight entered an unexpected dust cloud that considerably reduced visibility. This unexpected weather phenomenon forced the flight to spread apart somewhat, but they were able to maintain visual meteorological condition (VMC). The flight broke out of the dust after about thirty minutes only to enter a second cloud. This cloud was much thicker. The aircraft lost sight of one another and could not maintain VMC. The flight was forced to separate.

While in this thick cloud of dust, known as a haboob, helicopter number five experienced mechanical problems with its flight instruments. The aircraft commander decided to return to the Nimitz. Helicopter number two experienced a secondary hydraulic pump failure, but continued on to Desert One.

The C-130s arrived at Desert One on schedule, at approximately 2400 hours. After their arrival, the ground forces off-loaded and secured the area. In maintaining security, the ground force was forced to seize a bus loaded with forty-four Iranian civilians. They were also required to fire on a small fuel truck that refused to stop. Both of these vehicles were traveling along a road that split the Desert One rendezvous site, thus the reason for stopping them.

At approximately 0105 hours on 25 April, six hours after take off, six helicopters closed at Desert One. Helicopter number two, however, was deemed unflyable because of the hydraulic pump. This left only five flyable helicopters to execute the remainder of the mission. The plan called for a minimum of six, and the decision was made to abort the mission.

As the helicopters were repositioning to refuel for the flight back to the aircraft carrier, helicopter number three collided with one of the C-130s. The resulting explosion and fire killed eight servicemen and injured five. The remainder of the force abandoned the other helicopters and departed on C-130s.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STRATEGIC LEVEL

THE NATIONAL COMMAND AUTHORITY

The planning for a rescue mission began almost immediately after the hostages were taken. Just two days after the Iranians seized the U.S. embassy on 4 November 1979, President Carter's National Security Adviser (NSA), Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, telephoned Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and instructed him to have the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) develop a plan to rescue the hostages.¹ Depending on which personal account you read, it is unclear as to who initiated the planning of the rescue mission. Dr. Brzezinski, in his 18 April 1982, New York Times Magazine article, takes full credit for initiating the planning. He felt that a rescue plan was important, especially if the Iranians put the hostages on trial or harmed them in any way.² President Carter, on the other hand, gives credit to the collective "we" for commencing plans for a possible rescue operation.³ This is certainly not a point worth belaboring, but is important to note that the President probably did not take quick, decisive action in having a military option made available to him. Rather, his NSA felt it was the appropriate thing to do and did so. It lends a tone of indecisiveness to the President and with this type of problem, that is the last thing he needs to display to subordinates. Decisive leadership is the key to any military operation. If it is not present at the top, someone else has to make up for it and that is difficult to do. Therefore, from the plan's conception, the Commander in Chief was uncertain as to its feasibility.

Even though he may not have been convinced that a rescue attempt was

the right answer, President Carter was truly upset:

The first week of November 1979 marked the beginning of the most difficult period of my life. The safety and well-being of the American hostages became a constant concern for me, no matter what other duties I was performing as President. I would walk in the White House gardens early in the morning and lie awake at night, trying to think of additional steps I could take to gain their freedom without sacrificing the honor and security of our nation. I listened to every proposal, no matter how preposterous, all the way from delivering the Shah for trial as the revolutionaries demanded to dropping an atomic bomb on Tehran.⁴

Anything that might have jeopardized the safety of the hostages was of major importance to the President. In fact, some critics say he may have been too concerned, at least as far as a public show of emotion for them was concerned.⁵ Was the President afraid of the Ayatollah Khomeini? Some of his actions might suggest he was. He urged his administration officials, as well as members of the Congress, not to use abusive language about the Ayatollah or the kidnappers which might provoke violence against the hostages.⁶

President Carter was also concerned with the international issue that the hostage situation brought about. Iran was important to the free world as it prevented the Soviet Union from establishing a foothold in the oil rich Middle East. The President did not want to push the Iranians too far as it might push them right into the laps of the Soviets, a situation he definitely wanted to avoid.⁷

This concern for Soviet involvement did little for the differing of opinion between the President and his NSA. Almost from the beginning, Dr. Brzezinski was in favor of combining the rescue attempt with a retaliatory strike. The strike would inflict damage on Iran, but would avoid heavy civilian casualties. Dr. Brzezinski's logic was to link a punitive strike with the rescue operation, giving the overall mission a broader scope and, thereby preventing the continued humiliation of the United States if the rescue attempt failed.⁸ In

other words, if the rescue failed, it could be played down as just a small part of an overall successful mission. Although the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) concurred, the President elected not to use this option.⁹

The NSA was not the only source of dissention in the White House. The Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, was vehemently opposed to any military action at all. So much opposed, in fact, he resigned his office.¹⁰ In his memoirs, President Carter mentions several times that Mr. Vance would not support him during this crisis. On one occasion, a group of religious leaders wanted to talk to the President and discourage him from taking military action. The President asked Mr. Vance to meet with them for him, but Mr. Vance refused. The President's comment, "Not another word was said. . . . this was a very serious moment - the first time I, as President, had ever had anyone directly refuse to obey an official order of mine."¹¹

This disagreement affected the mission planners who needed information from the State Department. General David C. Jones, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, directed his staff not to deal with any of the State Department personnel since the agency was opposed to any military option. There were several times during the planning phase where the planners needed information from the State Department.¹² This is the first instance where unity of effort and unity of command fail at the top, impacting the ranks below.

The President's decision was not an easy one. But to have two of his most trusted advisers disagree with his decision, one in part and the other completely, could not have made the decision any easier. It could inherently cause the President to question his decision and possibly weaken his confidence in it. Once the commander makes his final decision, his staff should work with him towards affecting that decision. It simply provides for unity of effort.

Although the President pledged to the military there would be no interference from the White House,¹³ there is some evidence to the contrary. His guidance to the military was to keep the assault force lean and small and to exercise maximum operational security to ensure total surprise. Throughout the entire operation, he would stress maximizing security.¹⁴ He also instructed General Jones to devote his personal attention to preventing wanton killings of Iranians.¹⁵ Another constraint, dictated by the President himself reads: "Everyone was under strict orders from me not to harm any innocent bystanders and to avoid bloodshed whenever possible."¹⁶ Still another representation of his guidance can be taken from his diary: We want it to be quick, incisive, surgical, no loss of American lives, not involve any other country, minimal suffering of Iranian people themselves, to increase their reliance on imports, sure of success, and unpredictable."¹⁷ This type of guidance exudes distrust and a lack of confidence in the mission planners and executors. By keeping the assault force small, the President took away some of the military's flexibility. He is almost telling the military "how" to accomplish the mission. Clausewitz reminds us not to go to war if we do not intend to use the forces necessary to win¹⁸. Could a larger force have accomplished the mission? To answer that is not the purpose here. But it certainly would have provided some other options, such as more helicopters, for example.

Fear of a security leak was of fundamental importance to Dr. Brzezinski, who was charged by the President to overwatch the mission planning.¹⁹ He was the primary conduit between the President and the CJCS, even though he had very little military experience. His thoughts:

My gravest concern was that any rescue mission would have to be assured maximum security and surprise, and I feared that the pattern of massive leakage in the United States Government, the endless multiplications of papers, the rather loose enforcement of the principles

of access, as well as the unavoidable penetration by hostile agents, would compromise our mission.²⁰

This atmosphere set the stage for the organization of the forces to execute the mission.

THE JOINT TASK FORCE ORGANIZATION

This unrestrained paranoia that loomed over the NCAs from the outset clearly impacted on the organization of the joint task force (JTF) (Figure 1). Because of the nature of the mission and the pressure for increased security, the JCS decided against using the JCS Crisis Action System (CAS). The JCS decided that the CAS would involve too many people and government agencies and would jeopardize security.²¹ In bypassing the CAS, the JCS was forced to form its organization from scratch.²² They would not have the benefit of developing the JTF staff from a unit already organized and designated in a contingency plan (CONPLAN). The staff originated with three Army special forces officers. Other arrangements, such as task organization planning, integration of concurrent planning by subordinate units, and determination of support requirements were "compartmentalized and reliant on ad hoc arrangements."²³ Intelligence was not the responsibility of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), rather an intelligence officer (J2) was selected and had to pull information from the different intelligence agencies.²⁴

If the JCS CAS had been put into motion and predesignated units tasked, many of the instabilities associated with the ad hoc organization, such as personnel, logistics, and training, would have been reduced.²⁵ The DIA would have been responsible for collecting and providing intelligence to the JTF, a much more suitable situation considering the sources DIA has access to. Using

the CAS would have improved the command framework throughout the organization as it was already in place vice building one from nothing. The CAS would have also energized the commander in chiefs (CINCs) of the unified and specified commands and required their support as necessary.²⁶ Field Manual 100-20 states: "The unified CINCs and their component commands are best able to plan and execute peacetime contingency operations along established command lines. This ensures that the commander who plans the mission executes it, thus avoiding unnecessary confusion."²⁷ It is important to note, that today the United States has a Joint Special Operations Command for just such contingencies.

JCS Pub 0-2 states that sound command organizations should provide for unity of effort, centralized direction, decentralized execution, common doctrine, and interoperability.²⁸ This JTF organization violates each one of these principles. Compartmentalization makes it very difficult for separate staffs to plan for the accomplishment of the same mission when each staff has a different mission. Synchronization becomes almost impossible if the staff officers are working on a need to know basis. Unity of effort and centralized direction both suffer when personnel are not briefed on the entire plan and have a full understanding of the commander's intent. The test of common doctrine and interoperability cannot be fully conducted if the different units from different services rarely train together towards the accomplishment of the common mission. Professor Snyder emphasizes the importance of recognizing that the command and control process at higher levels is successful only if the executing commander does the right thing. The organizational decisions made by the higher level commander should benefit the executing commander by creating workable command relationships, clearly defining the roles to be played at each echelon, and ensuring an effective information flow that sup-

ports decision making at the scene of action.²⁹ This JTF organization failed to meet those requirements.

First, there was no command structure between the Commander JTF (COMJTF) and the entire array of executors. For example, there was no overall air component commander to link the fixed wing and rotary wing assets. There was no ground component commander to link the Delta Force with the Ranger Battalion. Each of the executing commanders was responsible for their unit to include most of the resourcing. Coordination between units suffered because of this.

Second, roles were not clearly defined. When the JCS finally did appoint a deputy commander to the COMJTF, he was senior in rank to the COMJTF. The relationship may have been clear to those two officers, but it must have caused confusion in the minds of their subordinates. The role of the senior marine aviator was also questioned (details discussed in Chapter IV).

Finally, the information flow could not have been effective. Due to the compartmentalization, the information flow could only have been, for the most part, vertical. Very little horizontal communications took place.³⁰ Without effective horizontal and vertical communications, the information flow could not have benefitted decision making.

Some critics of the operation blame the JTF organizational structure on service parochialisms.³¹ There may be some truth to that accusation in the classified reports, but none in the unclassified material investigated for this paper. NCA apprehensions drove the organization of this JTF, and, more specifically, the pressure exerted on the CJCS and the COMJTF by the NCA resulted in compartmentalization and a never before tested organization.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL

ORGANIZATION FOR COMBAT

In many cases, it is difficult to classify a topic or action in this mission as strategic, operational, or tactical because of the size and scope of the force. Some would question the presence of an operational level in this scenario. However, U.S. Marine Corps Manual FMFM 1-1 states: "Regardless of size, if military force is being used to achieve a strategic objective, then it is being employed at the operational level."¹ There was obviously a strategic aim here and, just as obvious, a need to look at command and control of the operational level. For the purposes of this paper, if the issue dealt with the NCA or the JCS, it was classified as strategic. If the issue affected more than one of the executors at the bottom of the organizational chart, it was operational. And, if it only concerned one of the elements it was tactical.

The analysis of the operational level will start with organizational structure. Since there was no CINC involved in the mission, Major General James Vaught, the COMJTF, was the operational commander as well as the tactical commander. This required him to coordinate all the resourcing for the mission. Normally, the CINC involved would have accomplished this magnanimous feat. The COMJTF was also responsible for overseeing the joint training necessary to ensure mission accomplishment. Certainly two monumental and separate tasks that would normally require the full attention of a staff. With only a small and unfamiliar staff at the COMJTF level, many of the resourcing requirements fell back on the user. Colonel James Kyle, commander of the U.S.

Air Force assets involved, clearly stated the logistics problem:

A logistics officer is critical to a Special Operation such as this rescue mission, and one should have been assigned from the start. Barkett [the logistics officer eventually assigned to the JTF] had to devise his own system and succeeded only through determination and perseverance. It amazed me that he was as successful as he was. He was forced to use renegade tactics to procure what we needed. This points up the need for an established classified logistics support system that can effectively supply a Special Ops task force's needs and still maintain the necessary secrecy.²

If the JCS had used the CAS, a logistics base would have been in place. True, it might not have met all the needs of a special operations task force, but it was far better than nothing. Eventually, the JCS designated a deputy commander, Lieutenant General Philip Gast, to the JTF on 12 April. He had been assisting in the operation since November, aiding primarily with the helicopter pilot training (although he was an Air Force fighter pilot) and by providing insight on Tehran, his area of expertise.³ As mentioned earlier, the deputy was a lieutenant general and the commander a major general.

Even with a deputy assigned, there were no other commanders between the COMJTF and his executing commanders. This left the tactical commanders to coordinate and synchronize their own actions with each other, when the need to know was apparent. More importantly it left a void in the command structure during the execution of the mission. There was no one with the forces in Iran who was overall in charge. There were several commanders of equal rank, the Delta Force commander (Colonel Charles Beckwith) and the C-130 commander (Colonel James Kyle) to name two. Both of these officers, in their personal narratives, state there was no problem with this relationship.⁴ The point here is not the relationship among the commanders, but the fact that there was no single commander to take charge, coordinate the efforts, and report the status of these forces. The COMJTF planned to remain in Egypt until

the second night and meet the rescue team and hostages at the extraction airfield. The deputy commander planned to remain in place at Masirah.⁵

On 31 March, Colonel Kyle was designated the on-scene commander of Desert One. But by waiting until 31 March, this command position equated to little less than mere formality. General Vaught decided to give the command to Colonel Kyle only after asking Colonel Beckwith if he wanted it. Colonel Beckwith's reply was that he did not have time to fool with it.⁶ This conversation lends some credence to the importance placed on this "command". The force only rehearsed with this command structure once before executing the mission.

As for the COMJTF's location, Colonel Beckwith felt General Vaught should remain in Egypt for both nights of the operation. He saw no need for having a two star general and his staff in Iran. They would only be in the way. However, General Vaught insisted on at least being at the extraction sight.⁷ Again, as with the command of Desert One, the decision making process consisted of asking Colonel Beckwith's opinion. In short, there was no overall commander to accompany the forces into Iran, violating the principle of unity of command. U.S. Marine Corps manual, FMFM 1 reminds us that, "A commander should command well forward. This allows him to see and sense firsthand the ebb and flow of combat, to gain an intuitive appreciation for the situation which cannot be obtained from reports"⁸ It is understandable why the COMJTF decided to stay in Egypt, but some type of commander should have accompanied the forces into Iran.

JOINT TRAINING

COMJTF was responsible for preserving the security of the operation by ensuring that no one group was aware of operational details of another unit unless there was an absolute need to know.⁹ This prohibited full rehearsals, synchronization, and unity of effort. Elements worked towards their own goals rather than mission accomplishment. U.S. Army FM 100-5 states:

The command and control system must also stress standardized training in operations and staff practices to assure mutual understanding between leaders and units. . . . War gaming, rehearsals, and realistic training promote initiative and flexibility by preparing units and their leaders for cooperation in the chaos of combat without time-consuming coordination.¹⁰

Each element of the JTF trained at different locations across the United States and, in one case, Guam. Each unit trained under its own commander with the elements rarely training together. In fact, a full scale rehearsal was never conducted using the entire force with all of its equipment and there were only four joint rehearsals.¹¹ This lack of training resulted in some surprises when the force actually arrived at Desert One. Colonel Kyle wrote, "We now had ten aircraft at Desert One, all with their engines running. Although this was according to plan, the blowing sand and grit was worse than we had experienced or expected."¹² If the JTF had conducted a full scale rehearsal using all aircraft involved, they may have been better prepared for the problem and adopted a different plan for repositioning and refueling at Desert One. Could this have prevented the collision? It was cited as a contributing factor to the accident that the helicopter pilot lost ground references after engulfing himself in a dust cloud created by his own rotor wash.¹³

Colonel Beckwith, himself does justice to the joint training situation he encountered when responding to questions during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing:

If Coach Bear Bryant at the University of Alabama put his quarterback in Virginia, his backfield in North Carolina, his offensive line in Georgia, and his defense in Texas, and then got Delta Airlines to pick them up and fly them to Birmingham on game day, he wouldn't have his winning record. Coach Bryant's teams, the best he can recruit, practice together, live together, eat together, and play together. He has a team. In Iran we had an ad hoc affair. We went out, found bits and pieces, people and equipment, brought them together occasionally and then asked them to perform a highly complex mission. The parts all performed, but they didn't necessarily perform as a team. Nor did they have the same motivation.¹⁴

Joint training was certainly an issue for this unit. Because of security constraints and the unorthodox organization, they were unable to adhere to the principles quoted from FM 100-5.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications was an issue at the operational level, not in terms of the command and control system as communications is normally thought of, but in terms of the process. Several satellite communications (SATCOM) radios were made available to the different teams. Here again, lack of rehearsal proved to be a problem. The radios were not available before the mission for the crews to rehearse with and become familiar with. Only Delta Force had prior experience with them. The price was paid when the C-130s attempted to warn the RH-53Ds on the impending dust clouds. The C-130s reached the dust clouds first and were able to see them because of their greater altitude. When they attempted to contact the helicopters they could not determine how to use the code matrix and gave up on their attempt to warn the RH-53Ds.¹⁵ If the

organization had included a CINC with an established logistics flow, the radios may have been available in time to rehearse with them and become familiar with them.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TACTICAL LEVEL

HELICOPTER DETACHMENT

The primary command and control problem at the tactical level was with the helicopter detachment. As with many of the previous issues in this paper, the origin of its problems can be traced back up the chain to the initial decision makers and the organizational structure. Before choosing the pilots, the JTF had to determine the type of heavy lift aircraft best suited for the mission. The U.S. Navy's RH-53D was chosen for several sound reasons, but primarily because it was commonly used off of, or around, aircraft carriers in conducting its normal mine countermeasures mission.¹ Ideally, these aircraft would not arouse suspicion if spotted by unfriendly eyes. The pilots did not come from the same unit as the aircraft. In fact, the pilots did not come from one unit, but from several. There were seven crews of five men each selected. The pilots and mechanics were from the Navy because of their familiarity with the aircraft and aircraft carriers. The copilots and door gunners were from the Marine Corps because of their experience with flying low level over the ground.² The selection of this mix of pilots failed to consider the doctrine mentioned earlier from FM 100-5: "... the command and control system must stress standardized training in operations and staff practices. . ."³

It also failed to consider unity of command and unity of effort. These pilots were new to each other and to their commander. It would take some time for cockpit teamwork to come about, particularly considering the type of conditions they were flying under. The Navy and the Marine Corps have dif-

ferent standards in their flight training and techniques. So different, the Navy pilots had to be replaced.⁴

Apparently, the mission required flight maneuvers that broke Navy regulations and some pilots were uncomfortable with breaking them (and rightfully so). These pilots deserve credit for standing up for their values, however, they should never have been selected. It is not a feasible concept to expect someone to perform without flaw in a totally unfamiliar environment. Secondly, the organizer of the task force failed to provide the detachment with a staff.⁵ This left the detachment unable to affect internal command and control or to coordinate for external resources.

A good argument could be made that this detachment had no less than four commanders during its existence. Initially, Navy Commander Van Goodloe was charged with command of the detachment. Colonel Charles Pittman, considered one of the Marine's foremost helicopter experts, and Lieutenant General Gast shared an informal responsibility of supervising the training program for the crews.⁶ Depending on the source, each of these officers was considered the detachment commander by various people. To further confuse the issue, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Ed Seiffert replaced Commander Goodloe in mid December as the "official" detachment commander. This situation draws on Professor Snyder's statement that executing commanders benefit from organizational decisions that create workable command relationships, clearly define the roles to be played, and ensure sufficient staff and facilities are available.

Staff is a key word and brings up the final organizational problem of the flight detachment: there was no staff assigned. There was no officer dedicated to intelligence, logistics, training, or operations.⁷ It could be argued that

Lieutenant General Gast and Colonel Pittman served as the staff, but that would have some far reaching implications.

The commander of this unit had a great burden to bear. He was responsible for taking a group of pilots with no special operations experience, train them to fly six-hundred nautical miles at night over desert and mountains; become proficient in night refueling operations from a C-130; fly to a mountain hideout; and finally, perfect the technique of landing in an embassy compound or a soccer stadium.⁸ The JTF should have clearly defined the chain of command in this unit and given them the resources to accomplish the mission.

STANDARD PROCEDURES

"Train as you intend to fight" is a commonly used phrase in the military and "realistic training" is emphasized in the section on command and control in FM 100-5. During training, the helicopter detachment primarily used CH-53s rather than the RH-53Ds they would use on the mission. They only had "up to three RH-53Ds available in the training program to provide experience."⁹ There is not a great deal of difference in the way the two aircraft handle in flight, but there is a difference in the technical data. One such difference concerns illumination of the BIM caution light discussed in Chapter I. A BIM warning on the RH-53D is not, in itself, justification for an abort or grounding of the aircraft. It simply means there may be some loss of nitrogen pressure in the blade and calls for a visual inspection of the faulty blade to determine if there is a crack in the blade. If no crack is found, the aircraft can be flown for another fifteen flight hours.¹⁰ On the CH-53, a BIM warning is a grounding condition.¹¹ The Marines were accustomed to flying the CH-53s both be-

fore their assignment to the JTF and during their training exercises with the JTF. Since RH-53Ds were not used for most of the training, their old habits could only be enforced and they were never aware of the difference in technical data.¹² The pilot never confirmed a blade crack on the RH-53D in the Iranian desert.¹³ It is possible that a flyable aircraft was abandoned in the desert because of poor command and control procedures used during organization and training and not because of a mechanical failure. If the detachment had used only RH-53Ds during training, there is a good chance this problem would have come about in time for the pilots to learn the difference. Of course no one can say that the mission would have succeeded, but it would have had a better chance with the sixth aircraft. During the Congressional Hearings on the mission, this point was never addressed. Nor, was it brought out by the Holloway Commission.

Another command and control problem at the tactical level was the failure to establish sufficient communications procedures. The plan called for the helicopter flight to use light signals only in order to maintain radio listening silence.¹⁴ When the flight entered the dust storm and lost visual contact with each other, it also lost its means of communication. The communications procedure is not the issue, but the failure to plan for an emergency use of the radios is questionable. The unit was so confident they would have VMC conditions they removed the secure radio equipment used for communicating between helicopters.¹⁵ The aircraft that returned to the Nimitz was only thirty minutes from breaking out of the dust storm before turning back. According to the pilot, he would have continued to Desert One if he had known this information.¹⁶ Without communications, the entire flight was unaware of the others' situation.

WEATHER

The Air Weather Service (AWS) knew of this dust cloud phenomenon, known as haboobs, that were peculiar to the Southern Iranian desert. They did not, however, have the ability to forecast in the region since the loss of several transmission sites after the fall of the Shah.¹⁷ Therefore, they conducted a survey of past recorded weather and, from that information, constructed a chart of the hazardous weather conditions that the aircrews might encounter. The AWS predicted these dust clouds and even forecasted them to be along a two-hundred nautical mile stretch of the helicopter route. The information was included in the weather annex of the OPLAN.¹⁸ The written OPLAN, however, was not released for dissemination throughout the JTF and the pilots were never briefed on the subject. The AWS did not personally brief the pilots to preserve security. A J2 representative filtered the information and only presented that information that he deemed necessary to the pilots.¹⁹ If the pilots had known of this possible condition, they could have been prepared for it. Again, standard command and control procedures were sacrificed.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Command and control is a broad topic area, yet it requires acute attention when putting it to use. The adherence to its principles must begin at the strategic or national level. If it does not, the risk is great that the violation of these principles will manifest themselves at the tactical level.

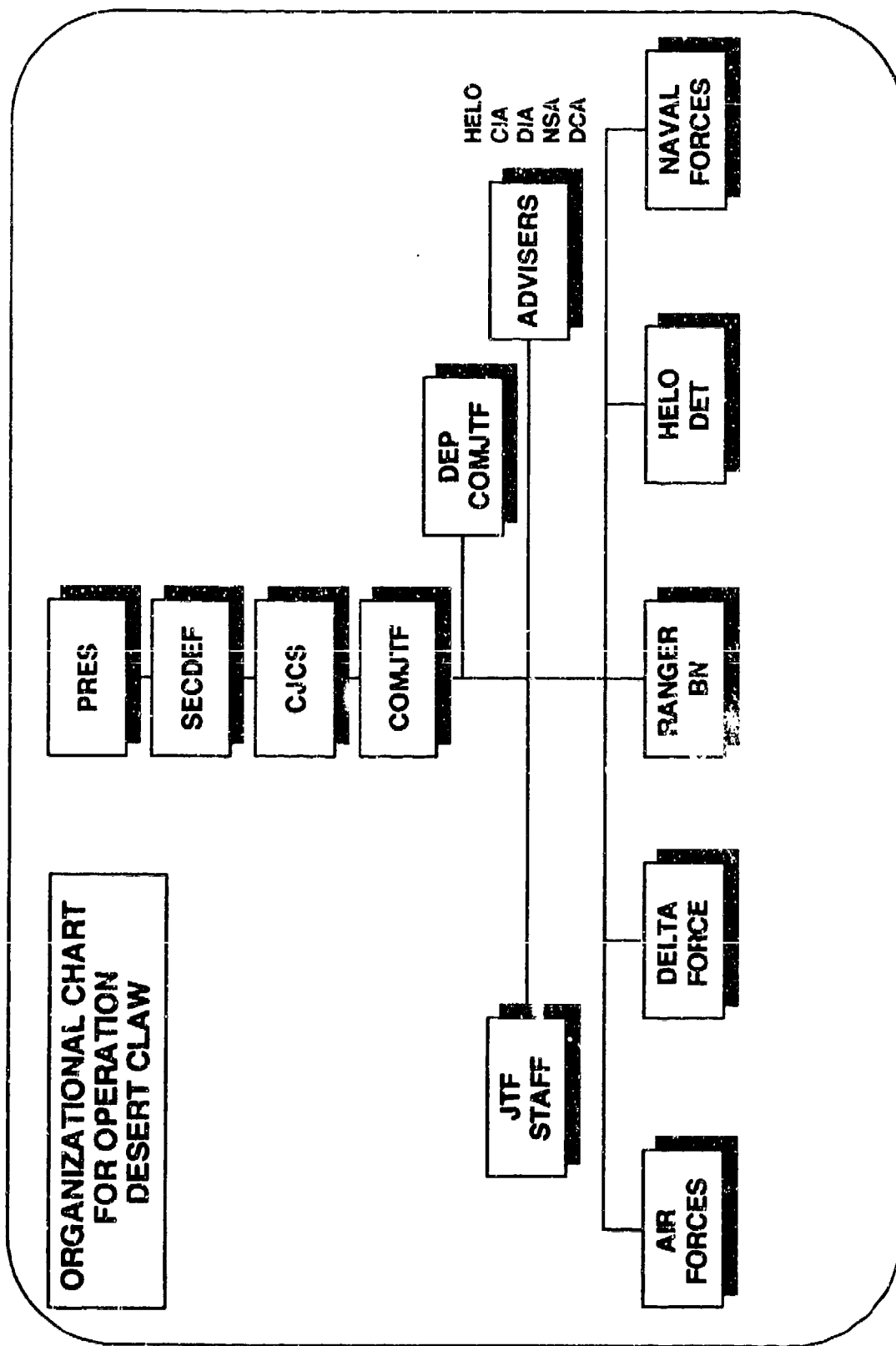
Operation DESERT CLAW is the perfect example. The problems were initiated at the NCA/NSC level. The policy makers at this level could not agree on a course of action to take in regards to the hostages. Because of these disagreements, unity of effort suffered and cooperation on the matter dwindled among some agencies. In short, this affected the President's decision making process. He was unable to take swift, aggressive action, and when he finally did make a decision to attempt the rescue, it was caveated with notes of caution and timidity. Whether this was borne out of concern for the hostages or fear of failure is of little consequence; his decision lacked confidence and that spread to his subordinates.

This atmosphere of doubt transposed itself to the CJCS and the JCS as stringent guidance to spare bloodshed and ensure no security leaks were allowed. Based on this guidance, the JCS decided to bypass the standard JTF organization and build a rescue team from the ground up. The organization lacked standard procedures, well defined responsibilities, and sufficient joint training.

The impact is clear at the tactical level as being antonymous to the principles of command and control: interoperability problems, confusion with the chain of command, decentralized direction resulting from compartmentalization, and a lack of common doctrine. With this as evidence, it seems

suitable to close with that qualifying statement from Professor Snyder: "The command and control process at higher levels has been successful only if the executing commander does the right thing."¹

FIGURE 1



Source: James H. Kyle, *The Gifts to Try* (New York: Orion Books, 1990), p. 58.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Rescue Mission Report, (Washington: 1980) p. 3.

² Frank M Snyder, Command and Control: Readings and Commentary (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University), pp. 12-13.

³ Daniel P. Bolger, Americans at War, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988) p. 99.

⁴ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Department of Defense Appropriations, The Iran Hostage Rescue Mission, Statement and Discussion (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1980), pp. 605-675. [The mission synopsis is derived from this source].

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¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Failed Mission," The New York Times Magazine, 18 April 1982, p. 28.

² Ibid.

³ Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. 459.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Paul B. Ryan, The Iranian Rescue Mission: Why it Failed (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), p. 10.

⁶ Carter, p. 459.

⁷ Brzezinski, p. 64.

⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁰ Carter, pp. 507, 513.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 513.

¹² James H. Kyle, The Guts to Try (New York: Orion Books, 1990), p. 33.

¹³ Carter, p. 507.

- 14 Ryan, p. 15.
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- 17 Ibid., p 461.
- 18 Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 283.
- 19 Ryan, p. 12.
- 20 Brzezinski, p.29
- 21 Ryan, p. 114.
- 22 Rescue Mission Report, p. 15.
- 23 Ibid., p. 15.
- 24 Ryan, p. 31.
- 25 Rescue Mission Report, p. 17.
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- 31 Edward N. Luttwak, The Pentagon and the Art of War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 271.

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- 2 Kyle, p. 102.
- 3 Ryan, p. 22.

⁴ Charlie A. Beckwith, Delta Force (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1983), p. 248. Ryan, p. 283.

⁵ Ryan, p. 223.

⁶ Beckwith, p. 248.

⁷ Ibid., p. 249.

⁸ U.S. Department of the Navy, Warfighting, FMFM 1 (Washington: 1989), p. 65.

⁹ Ryan, p. 19.

¹⁰ Operations, FM 100-5, pp. 21-22.

¹¹ Richard A. Gabriel, Military Incompetence, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 107.

¹² Kyle, p.286.

¹³ Beckwith, p. 295.

¹⁴ Kyle, p. 329.

Chapter IV

¹ Kyle, p. 48.

² Ibid., p59.

³ Operations, FM 100-5, p. 21.

⁴ Ryan, p. 41.

⁵ Rescue Mission Report, p. 15.

⁶ Kyle, p49.

⁷ Rescue Mission Report, p. 15.

⁸ Ryan, p.25.

⁹ House Department of Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, p. 617.

¹⁰ Kyle, p. 115.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 333.

¹² Kyle, p. 333.

¹³ Ibid., p250.

¹⁴ Ryan, p. 73.

¹⁵ Kyle, p. 330.

¹⁶ Ryan, p. 75.

¹⁷ Kyle, p. 327-328.

¹⁸ Rescue Mission Report, p. 38.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Chapter V

¹ Snyder, p. 18.

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